OPEN Doors

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Roger Barsy

Director Reviews 35 Years of Changes

Residential Tenancies Branch Director Roger Barsy retired in early July, after almost 35 years with the provincial government. He was part of many important changes in landlord and tenant relations since his first job with the Rentalsman's Office in 1973 and in his various roles as that office evolved into today's Residential Tenancies Branch.

"The industry was governed by a different kind of legislation back then," says Barsy. "The Landlord and Tenant Act didn't have the broad scope The Residential Tenancies Act has. For example, landlords were forced to use the courts, a lengthy and costly option, when they needed to evict a tenant." The province has worked closely with landlords and tenants over the years to address recurring issues and eventually developed The Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) passed in 1992.

"Manitoba has been the frontrunner when it comes to landlord/tenant legislation," Barsy says, "not only in the legislation itself, but in the way it was developed and continues to evolve. Other provinces have looked to us as the leaders in this area."

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Contributions from the rental industry, tenant groups, the courts, businesses and community associations have been and continue to be integral to the development of the act and the creation of branch policy. The goal, he says, was for government to work with all these stakeholders to create legislation that allows tenants and landlords to resolve their differences fairly, informally, inexpensively, quickly and amicably. Barsy believes that "part of leadership is being persistent toward a goal" and the branch has

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been constant in its objective of serving landlords and tenants across the province.

The retired director appreciated the way technology has enhanced client service at the branch, particularly with the use of the Internet. His foresight was integral to setting up the branch website. It began as an educational tool and evolved into an interactive service site for clients to find forms, file notices and applications, calculate security deposit interest and receive reliable information. There were over 100,000 visits to the website in the past year. Internally, the branch has implemented an electronic case management system. Now in Phase 2, it incorporates data filed electronically by clients directly into the branch's business process and rent registry. Barsy predicts even more interactive electronic services to clients in the future.

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Continual improvement in client service has been a mainstay of Barsy's administrative style. "Administrative fairness is essential in the work we do," he says and cites the development of the Policies and Procedures Guidebook as a major benefit to both landlords and tenants. "It's a huge educational tool. It shows we have no hidden agenda. The policies are set by thoughtful decision-making, precedence and, sometimes, old-fashioned common sense. What's important is that the policies are out there for everyone to see. It shows the branch is transparent and accountable for its decisions."

Barsy has been impressed with the accomplishments of community-based groups such as the West Broadway Neighbourhood Association. Some of the buildings affected by their work have undergone miraculous renewal and the people at the centre of it are equally transformed. He also congratulates and encourages organizations such as the Tenant Landlord Co-operation Committee (TLC) where landlords and tenants work together toward their mutual well-being. These groups and others like them, he says, support his belief that, given the proper resources, people have the knowledge and skill to solve their own problems. These are people, he says, whose only concern is to do the right thing for their communities.

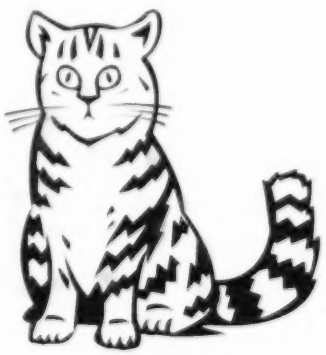
Barsy credits many of the accomplishments and advances in residential tenancies over the years to support from senior government leaders, valuable information from the Research and Planning Branch and the talented, hardworking people who have worked in his branch. His role, he says, has been to push the agenda forward but it's been his staff who "does the heavy lifting. These are the people who make it happen."

The retired director is most proud of the influence the branch has on dispute resolution, helping people cut through the red tape and find solutions. "The work we do is significant to our clients," he adds. "The work will survive me because it's relevant and valuable in itself."

PET-FRIENDLY

Landlords are allowed to make and enforce reasonable house rules for tenants. The rules must be given to the tenants in writing. One of the most common house rules is 'No Pets'.

Tenants with pets sometimes have a difficult time finding rental units that accept pets. The Winnipeg Humane Society has a list of pet-friendly apartments across the city on its website (www.winnipeghumanesociety.ca). Landlords with pet friendly buildings can call the society at 982-2021 to be added to the list. Tenants seeking to rent outside the City of Winnipeg should check with individual landlords before entering into a tenancy agreement.



Changes to Rent Regulation Forms Effective May 31, 2007

The Residential Tenancies Branch continues to work closely with tenants and landlords to stay informed about their needs. Both landlords and tenants will benefit from improvements made to these forms:

- Notice of Rent Increase (NORI)
- Notice to New Tenant (NTNT)
- Application for Rent Increase Above Guideline

Highlights of the changes include:

Landlords who have given tenants a rental discount and intend to reduce or withdraw it, must give tenants three months' written notice. Changes to the NORI and NTNT forms mean landlords can now use them to give this notice to tenants.

When new tenants enter into a tenancy agreement, landlords must give them a NTNT form. Landlords who have already decided how much to increase rent, must complete the third column of the form, regardless of when the increase will take effect or whether the increase is above the guideline.

The Application for Rent Increase Above Guideline form now includes a new schedule called Landlord's Summary Information. The summary highlights the increased costs and other factors that caused the landlord to apply for the above guideline increase. When landlords apply for an above guideline increase their tenants are entitled to see the application and other information provided. The branch sends a copy of the summary to the tenants. This will help tenants who cannot get to the branch to see the file or who prefer not to review all of the details. Tenants may still view the entire file if they wish to.

Landlords will soon be able to complete and file all these forms with the branch electronically. The electronic forms website will make the calculations for you. Visit www.manitoba.ca/rtb to access online forms. The branch will continue to provide paper forms. To order the new forms or, if you have questions, contact the branch at 945-2476 in Winnipeg; or toll free at 1-800-792-8403.

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES BRANCH
HELPING LANDLORDS AND TENANTS ONLINE

Tenants and landlords who want information about residential tenancies can visit the Manitoba Residential Tenancies Branch website at www.manitoba.ca/rtb. The site includes:

- frequently asked questions and answers
- the Policies and Procedures Guidebook
- fact sheets
- forms
- a security deposit calculator
- recent newsletters
- The Residential Tenancies Act
- The Life Leases Act
- information about unclaimed security deposits and rent refunds

If your prefer to contact the branch personally, contact one of three offices in Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson. (See back page for contact information).

Mediation Services Available through

Residential Tenancies Branch

Tenants and landlords who need help resolving their difference can get help through the Residential Tenancies Branch mediation services. The goal of mediation is to help both parties work out their differences easily and amicably and find an agreeable solution.

When disputes arise, the parties can agree to mediation, advise the branch and have a mediation officer assigned to their case. Mediation officers do not take sides or make judgements. They guide the discussion and help the landlord and tenant focus on solving the problem. When the parties agree to a solution, the officer writes up an agreement outlining the terms the parties agreed to and the consequences of not keeping the agreement.

In over 80 per cent of mediation cases, the parties honour their agreements, mainly because they had input in the process and understand the agreements are enforceable. Many landlords and tenants welcome mediation because it allows them to end the dispute without harming their relationship.

Need information?

ONLINE
www.manitoba.ca/rtb

OFFLINE
in person or by phone

Visit your branch office Monday to Friday
from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Winnipeg at 302–254 Edmonton Street
or call **945-2476**

Brandon at 157–340 9th Street
or call **726-6230**

Thompson at 113–59 Elizabeth Drive
or call **667-6496**

Toll-free 1-800-782-8403

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